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at Soka University
for the Academic Year 1998

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Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology
(ARIRIAB)

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Vol. 2

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Hendrik Kern and the Lotussūtra¹

by Tilman Vetter

At the start of this conference, it seems appropriate to commemorate Hendrik Kern, the first professor of Sanskrit at Leiden University, appointed in 1865. He is best remembered as translator and co-editor of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, 'the Lotus of the True Law', as he said. Information about his life and other achievements can be got from Hanna t' Hart's essay "Imagine Leiden without Kern", of which the participants have received a copy.

I focus on Kern's dealing with the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, or rather on those aspects that might still be worth mentioning. First his translation published in 1884 is discussed, then the Introduction to the translation, and finally his contribution to Bunyiu Nanjio's edition of the Sanskrit text published in 1912.

First his translation. It appeared in 1884 as volume XXI of the *Sacred books of the East* and was reprinted in 1963. It seems still to be the only English translation of a Sanskrit version made by a philologist. Though containing some mistranslating and speculative footnotes on astronomical entities said to be meant by the text (e.g., p. 230 on *Prabhūtaratna*), it gives, on the whole, a fair access to the two Nepalese manuscripts (Cambridge, nos. 1682, 1683) it was based upon and, with some restrictions, also to the Kern-Nanjio edition of 1912, which refers to more manuscripts.

¹ This was an opening speech at "The IV. International Conference on the Lotussūtra", Leiden, 2-3 May 1998. The author would like to thank Professor Yuichi Kajiyama for stimulating remarks on the Lotus Sūtra, when he stayed as a Numata Professor at Leiden University in the first quarter of 1998.

In *this* function it cannot be replaced by English translations of Kumārajīva's Chinese version, though these may be more readable and often even represent a more original text (see below). For such translations also reflect variant readings that are not represented by the Kern-Nanjio edition and, moreover, additions by Chinese scholars, probably including Kumārajīva himself². Scholars of East Asian Buddhism who insufficiently know Prakrit and Sanskrit are advised to keep to Kern's translation when they wish to refer to deviations in the Sanskrit tradition. Leon Hurvitz has marred his excellent, though not totally flawless, translation of Kumārajīva's version by attempts himself to translate such passages from the Kern-Nanjio edition. He made, as Jan Willem de Jong (E.B., X,2 169) has correctly observed, elementary mistakes that did not occur to Kern.

Kern's translation is preceded by an Introduction of 31 pages. Here he presents some observations and conjectures about form and contents of the Lotus. Three items might still be worth considering. First his idea about the original form of the sūtra (p. xviii) : "*Repeatedly, both in prose and poetry, the Sūtra is spoken of as consisting of stanzas; e.g. chap.vii, st. 82; chapters x and xxii in the prose portion, several times. As the term for stanza (gāthā), for aught I know, is never used to denote a certain number of syllables, there is a strong presumption that the ancient text consisted of verses, with an admixture of short prose passages serving as an introduction or to connect the more solemn poetical pieces. The idea to expand such passages into a regular prose version would especially recommend itself at a period when the poetical dialect began to become obsolete and obscure.*"

² E.g. at T.262.56c7 an addition to the explanation of the name of the Bodhisattva Avalokita-svara (which was the form of the name that he and Dharmarakṣa seem to have had in their Indic texts; cp. Mironov 1927).

Kern makes some reservations regarding the last chapters, which he considers to be additions³, and adds: "*In contending that the original text of the Sūtra was probably, in the main, a work in metrical form, I do not mean to say that the poetical version in all the chapters must be considered to be prior to the prose.*"

In my view, this last remark should especially be applied to the third chapter, 'on the burning house', if one wishes to work with this hypothesis, which is reasonable, but not without problems. The *metrical* part of this chapter in all versions teems with descriptions of the horrors of the house even before the children are threatened by fire. Reciters seem to have desired to describe this symbol of the world as beset with a variety of dangers. But this can hardly have been part of the original simile, to which the idea of a rich father appears to have belonged. A rich father would already have given up such a house in an earlier phase and no promises would have been needed to make the children leave it in case of an emergency. The *prose* versions are almost silent about these horrors and make good sense, notably Dharmarakṣas's that is here much shorter than Kumārajīva's. So all verses describing these horrors should be considered as additions.

Another interesting item in Kern's Introduction (p.xx) is a conjecture on the relative age of the respective Sanskrit versions used by Dharmarakṣa and Kumārajīva for their Chinese translations. From Nanjio's Catalogue of the Tripiṭaka (Oxford, 1883) Kern had learnt that in the three complete Chinese versions of the sūtra the last seven chapters appear in a different order. This and the contents of these chapters made

³ "It will not be objected that, because not all chapters in the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* have a poetical version added, the original cannot have been a poem. For the chapters containing but one version, viz. xxi, xxii, xxiii, xxv, and xxvi, show decided traces of being later additions; and as to the final chapter, it may be held to be a moderate amplification of a short prose epilogue."

him assume they were later additions, except the [essence of the] epilogue chapter that in Kumārajīva's text is the first of these seven chapters (no. XXII).⁴ The strange position of the epilogue chapter in Kumārajīva's translation, led him moreover to conjecture Kumārajīva might have had before him an older version of the Sanskrit text than Dharmarakṣa, who translated a 120 years before Kumārajīva. In Appendix B of *Skilful Means*, Michael Pye has added differentiations⁵ and arguments to Kern's and other scholars' ideas about this and made it a strong hypothesis that unfortunately is not known to most buddhologists, while Willy Baruch's hasty conclusions about Dharmarakṣa's and Kumārajīva's versions, reproduced in Heinz Bechert's *Über die 'Marburger Fragmente'*... (1972,14) , are still prevailing. However, this hypothesis should be a little modified on the grounds mentioned by Pye himself for the unlikelyness that a translator has abridged the text. At the few places where Dharmarakṣa has less text than Kumārajīva — I mentioned one — *his* text should be considered as representing an older state of development. There is obviously no version older than others in *every* chapter, but Kumārajīva's seems to be the oldest at far more places than the others.

I can add a philological argument for accepting the shortest version as the more original, in this case Kumārajīva's. While the well-

⁴ The comparative chart Kern has given on page xxi has to be improved (see also Pye 1978, 176). The order of these chapters in the Kern-Nanjio edition is: Dhāraṇī, Bhaiṣajyārāja, Gadgadasvara, Avalokiteśvara, Śubhavyūharāja, Samantabhadra, Anuparīdanā. In Dharmarakṣa's version (T. 263) it is: Bhaiṣajyārāja, Gadgadasvara, Avalokiteśvara, Dhāraṇī, Śubhavyūharāja, Samantabhadra, Anuparīdanā. And in Kumārajīva's version (T.262) it is: Anuparīdanā, Bhaiṣajyārāja, Gadgadasvara, Avalokiteśvara, Dhāraṇī, Śubhavyūharāja, Samantabhadra.

⁵ To which might be added: A remark in the introduction to T.264 that Kumārajīva's text did not contain the Devadattaparivarta is confirmed by the Farhad-Beg manuscript that definitely lacks the Devadattaparivarta. This chapter is added to the 11th chapter in other Sanskrit manuscripts and in the Taisho edition of Dharmarakṣa's translation, but appears as the twelfth chapter in older Chinese editions of Dharmarakṣa's translation and in Kumārajīva's translation.

known lack of the *second* half of the fifth chapter of other versions is one of the strongest arguments to assume that Kumārajīva's translation represents the oldest version at most places, I can also point to a passage in the *first* half of the fifth chapter where Kumārajīva's version is shorter and more consistent than the Kern-Nanjio edition and Dharmarakṣa's version, and seems to represent a more original state of the sūtra. In the verses 27-32 of the Kern-Nanjio edition and at T. 263.84b25 ff. the Dharma-rain, being everywhere of the same nature, falls on four kinds of beings that profit from this rain according to their capacity like medicinal herbs of different stature: very minor, minor, intermediate and high. But in the parallel verses in Kumārajīva's version (T.262.20a17 ff.) the Dharma-rain falls on only three kinds of beings that are likened to herbs of minor, intermediate and high size. These are a) *Cakravartins* and gods, b) ascetics (with characteristics of *arhats* as well as *pratyekabuddhas*), and c) beginning *bodhisattvas* (that evidently are not ascetics). Returning to the Sankrit text and Dharmarakṣa we see they separate *arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas* and compare them to minor and intermediate herbs, and the gods to very minor herbs. As the transition from very minor to minor is not smooth⁶, I assume the text was tampered with

⁶ T.262.20a17 ff. says (in Hurvitz's translation) "I have filled the world,/ Just as the rain moistens everything,/ Noble and base, superior and inferior,/ ... / Sending down the Dharma-rain equally / and never wearying. / Among the living beings / those who hear my Dharma, in accordance with what they are strong enough to accept, / Dwell on their several grounds. Some dwell among men, gods,/ Wheel-turning sage-kings, Śakra, Brahmā, and their several kings: These are the lesser medicinal herbs. / Those who know dharmas without outflow, /Who can attain nirvāṇa, / Who can raise up the six supernatural penetrations / And attain the three clarities, / Who can dwell alone in mountains and in forests, / Who constantly practice dhyāna-concentration, /And who contrive to bear direct witness as condition-perceivers — / These are the intermediate medicinal herbs. / Those who seek the Place of the World-Honored-One — / ... These are the superior medicinal herbs."

The Sanskrit text (vv.27 ff.) shows clear signs of intervening in this scheme, obviously because one wished to separate Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas, and call the Arhats low. After the mention of Śakra and Brahmā and *cakravartins*, a line follows which calls them very minor (*kṣudrānuṣudrā* cp. BHSD) herbs; then three lines

here to distinguish *arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas*, not that Kumārajīva abbreviated.⁷

A third item in Kern's Introduction that might still be of interest is the contention that a kind of theism, let us say: saviour theism, is part of the message of the Lotus. He thinks he can add something to an observation Eugene Burnouf had made (in his *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien*, 1844, 119). I freely render what Kern quotes in French (on page XXIV): *Although Śākyamuni is the most important of all beings, and is endowed with all perfections, and already shows a mythological character when he says that long ago he has often accomplished the deeds of a Buddha and will so do in future in spite of his approaching death ... and is described as creating other Buddhas from his body, he is nowhere called God (in French: Dieu) and nowhere called Ādibuddha.*

Kern says he has nothing to object to this, only something to add. But in fact he blames Burnouf for not having discovered places where the sūtra, according to Kern, is theistic. Burnouf had employed the expression 'nowhere'. So he was contented with finding one place where the Buddha seems to be called God and another where the term Ādibuddha seems to be implied. In stanza 31 of chapter 7, the Buddha is called *Devātideva*, which for Kern was 'the paramount god of gods' and corresponded to the term God as used in Christian tradition. And a prose passage [K-N 312,4] in chapter 14 (15 in Kumārajīva's version) inti-

follow that announce minor (*kṣudra*), intermediate and great herbs. Then capacities of an Arhat are depicted, which is concluded by the remark that they are called the minor herbs; then a description of Pratyekabuddhas follows, concluded by the remark that they are called intermediate herbs; etc. Dharmarakṣa's translation also reflects this complication (T.263. 84b25 ff.).

⁷ Cp. KN 73,14 (Ch.III) where *upāyena*, suggested by T.262.12c6 and very likely also by T.263. 75b 14, makes better sense than *upāyakauśalyena*; see also verse 70a of the chapter: *upāya so cintayī tasmi kāle*.

mated, for him, that Śākyamuni is identical with the Ādibuddha⁸ those scholars seem to have known from reports on Nepalese syncretism. Here Maitreya says he does not understand the Buddha declaring he has, from the very beginning (*ādita eva*)⁹, roused and brought to maturity the innumerable Bodhisattvas that had welled up from the earth.

One may doubt whether these two places justify to employ the word God. Some aspects of the word God are indeed covered by *devāti-deva* (also occurring in the *Mahābhārata*¹⁰), but certainly not that of oneness, because Dīpaṃkara is also addressed as *devātideva* in the Lotus [K-N 27,5; I v.89] and is clearly distinguished from Śākyamuni in another passage [K-N 317,11]. And the expression 'from the very beginning' (*ādita eva*), though amazing and perhaps even including eternity, again does not comprise the oneness one associates with the Ādibuddha in Nepalese Syncretism.

Kern might have felt the weakness of his philological argument and therefore withdrew to an overall impression one is expected to get by reading the sūtra: *"From the whole manner in which Śākya speaks of his existence in former times, it is perfectly clear that the author wished to convey the meaning that the Lord had existed from eternity, ... / Śākya has not only lived an infinite number of Aëons in the past, he is to live for ever. Common people fancy that he enters Nirvāṇa, but in reality he makes only a show of Nirvāṇa out of regard for the weakness of men."*

⁸ Recently G. Grönbold has published several 'Ādibuddhatexte' (1992 and 1995). He says (1992, 45): "Der Schlüssel zu ihrem Verständnis und zur richtigen religionsgeschichtlichen Bewertung und Einordnung liegt in der Tatsache, dass sie zum einen aus Nepal stammen und zum andern zeitlich recht späten Datums sind. Deshalb müssen sie wohl eher der Sonderentwicklung des Buddhismus in Nepal zugerechnet werden. Diese ist ja gekennzeichnet durch die zunehmende Nähe und gegenseitige Beeinflussung von Buddhismus und Hinduismus, was einen Buddhismus erzeugte, welcher mit der alten Lehre nicht mehr viel zu tun hatte."

⁹ Cp. T.263.41c21, T.263.112c11.

¹⁰ MBh 8.24.45a / 12.278.23c / 13.17.143a / 14.93.50a / 15.38.1c.

*He, the father of the world, the Self-born One, the Chief and Saviour of creatures, produces a semblance of Nirvāṇa, whenever he sees them given to error and folly ... it is only by a skilful device that he makes a show of it; and repeatedly he appears in the world of the living, though his real abode is on the summit of the Gr̥dhrakūṭa. All this is in other words the teaching of Nārāyaṇa in Bhagavadgītā IV 6-8" which Kern quotes in Sanskrit and I render freely: Though being the unborn and imperishable lord of beings I come into existence in every age to protect the good, destroy the wicked and establish the Dharma.*¹¹

To me this overall impression is also problematic. The Buddha is presented as equivalent to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, the unborn and imperishable lord of beings who appears on earth in every age *to protect the good, destroy the wicked and establish the Dharma*. There is of course the resemblance of a repeated human manifestation of a benevolent divine force. And though Dharma is meant here as the basis for preserving the world, the aim of surpassing it is found elsewhere in the Bhagavadgītā.

¹¹ Compare p.XXXII: "... [by the compilers] ... the whole [has been] with anxious care arranged in such a form that the Sūtra admitted of an exoteric and esoteric interpretation. It contains a state of things in the present, as well as in the past and the future, a revelation derived from a virtually eternal source, so that the doctrine taught in it must be deemed valid not only for a certain spiritual brotherhood or church, but for the human race at large. The highest authority to whom the doctrine is referred, is not a certain individual having lived a short span of time somewhere in India, but the sublime being who ... in the terminology of other Indian creeds is called kūtastha". At other places in Kern's writing on Buddhism the sublime being that 'stands at the top' (*kūtastha*), at least 'on Gr̥dhrakūṭa', is the sun. Also in this translation, at p.303 n.1. Cp. De Jong, E.B.VII,1 p.79: "... history of Buddhism in India, ... in 1882 and 1884. In the first volume Kern related first the life of the Buddha according to Pāli and Sanskrit sources ... His main sources are the same as those used by Senart: the Nidānakathā and the Lalitavistara ... After having retold the legend of the Buddha in great detail, Kern arrives at his interpretation. Like Senart he considers the Buddha to be a solar god. However, Kern is much more astronomical in his exegesis than Senart. The twelve *nidāna* are the twelve months of the year. The six heretical teachers are the planets. His first predication takes place in mid-summer. For this reason the Middle Way is its theme. Kern never hesitates in his identifications with stars, planets and constellations."

And the Buddha of the Lotus sometimes also guarantees prosperity in this world. Kern is even justified to attribute eternity to the Buddha. The cautious expression that his life-span cannot be measured is, in chapter 15 [K-N 319,1], followed by the positive expression of eternal presence: *sadā sthitaḥ* (cp. T.262. 42c and T.263.113c) . But even at that place the plurality of Buddhas is not given up and this is the greatest problem, if one wishes to speak of a kind of theism.

These passages might of course be considered as germs of more theistic aspects in later development. But what could be called the strongest germ in the Lotus for the development of the idea of *one* supernatural Teacher, later called Ādibuddha, was not referred to by Kern. It is the emanation from Śākyamuni of uncountable Buddhas presiding over uncountable worlds as mentioned in chapter 11 of the Lotus. There is no longer a need there that human Bodhisattva's endeavour to become Buddhas to enlighten Buddhaless worlds. But even there the idea of oneness is still checked by the presence of the Buddha Prabhūtaratna.

Finally a few words about the edition of the Sanskrit text of the Lotus published in 1912 as vol. X of the Bibliotheca Buddhica. It is based [see Preface] on a copy that Nanjio (and Kenjiu Kasawara) had made from a Nepalese manuscript of the Royal Asiatic Society in London [now no. 6, see Baruch p. 3] around 1882. Later on Nanjio collated this copy with five other manuscripts of Nepalese origin, and made an edition with variant readings in footnotes. This edition was given to Kern for a final judgement of obscure passages. And Kern added variant readings of a manuscript that had been found in Kashgar. He also adopted some of these readings in the text, though he was the first to observe [in an Additional Note] that the Kashgar manuscript represented another recension than the Nepalese manuscripts.

This edition has been of great service to many scholars. But when, in the thirties, Baruch (1938, 7-12) made a thorough study of the same manuscripts, he discovered that variant readings had often been ignored or inaccurately referred to. In this way, he said, it would be impossible to determine which manuscripts belonged together and how a text had been transmitted. And in 1974 de Jong¹² blamed Kern for having mixed up recensions by adopting readings from Central Asian manuscripts in the text. This would be neither fish nor flesh.

Let me briefly deal with these two reproaches. First that of inaccuracy in footnotes. Baruch is perfectly right in implying that this edition was not made according to standards of classical philology allowing to detect lines of transmission. But this can be said of most editions of Buddhism still depends on. Moreover Baruch admitted that one manuscript was rather correctly represented, namely that from which Nanjio and Kasawara had started. It would of course be nice, if we had an edition with a better *apparatus criticus*. Baruch undertook such an edition¹³, but it has been lost "thanks to Hitler" as he wrote after the war. In the meantime many *diplomatic* editions, or: romanized transcripts, of manuscripts and fragments (by Shoko Watanabe, Hirofumi Toda and others)

¹² E.B. VII,2 p.55: "... it will be necessary to separate manuscripts which belong to different streams of tradition. An edition such as Kern's edition of the *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka* which combines readings from Nepalese manuscripts with readings from the Central Asian Petrovsky fragments is neither flesh nor fish. The *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka* is a typical example of the problems connected with the editing of manuscripts of different origin: Nepalese manuscripts and fragments from Gilgit and Central Asia. One ought to edit the fragments separately before trying to reconstruct the history of the text. Once all the fragments from Gilgit and Central Asia have been properly edited, it will be possible to see how they relate to the text transmitted in Nepal. Until now only some fragments from Gilgit and Central Asia have been edited. The Nepalese manuscripts were not properly edited by Nanjio and Kern, as Baruch pointed out in his *Beiträge zum Saddharmapūṇḍarīka* (Leiden, 1938)".

¹³ In his *Beiträge zum Saddharmapūṇḍarīka* (Leiden, 1938) Baruch edited a few fragments of the Gilgit manuscript. His *apparatus criticus* covers more than half of the ten pages of this edition.

have appeared. If one is interested in variant readings and the relation between different versions, one can consult these editions, though it is sometimes tiresome to work with so many books and booklets. But of the editions that claim to present a readable text 'Kern-Nanjio' is still the best. As so often, it is better than what followed and depended on it. It shows variant readings that cannot be found in the editions by Wogihara/Tsuchida, Dutt, and Vaidya, though Wogihara/ Tsuchida made attempts to take note of the Tibetan translation and another manuscript, and Dutt presented a Central Asian fragment. The Kern-Nanjio edition has therefore rightly been chosen as reference in Yasunori Ejima's *Index to the Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* and in all *diplomatic* editions. And any future edition that tries to replace the Kern-Nanjio edition will have to refer to it for orientation.

Now the point of mixing up recensions. To speak of neither fish nor flesh is an exaggerated statement by de Jong, of which Kern himself is in so far the cause, as he failed to explain how he dealt with the Kashgar manuscript. This is part of the inaccuracy of the apparatus of 'Kern-Nanjio'. Kern does in fact keep apart the two recensions. When one looks in the Kashgar manuscript, now easily accessible via Toda's diplomatic edition, one can see that in Kern's footnotes normally all passages are ignored that are characteristic of the Kashgar manuscript as described by himself in an Additional Note to Nanjio's Preface [K-N p.VI] , namely "[it is]... *much more prolix, and in the metrical parts the verses often follow in a different order, but the most striking difference is the language of the prose parts ... In that language ... the number of Prākṛtisms and wrongly sanskritized expressions is incomparably greater than in the Nepalese MSS.*". To substantiate the last item the most prominent Prākṛtisms were registered by Kern in the Additional Note. In

the footnotes only those Kashgar readings appear that are close alternatives of a word in the text. And in the text itself only those Kashgar readings have been adopted that seemed to be the original or only correct ones. Such adoptions — and Kern's sporadic emendations — can always be questioned, but this is not mixing up recensions. They depend on the assumption that transmission can create readings nobody had intended, especially when reciting and copying a text without understanding came to prevail. Such readings should be removed from any edition that pretends to establish an early state of a text.

I cannot embark on philological arguments here¹⁴. Let me therefore point to an argument everybody can easily check, though it refers to a Kashgar variant mentioned by Kern only in a footnote. De Jong, who in 1974 had reproached Kern for offering neither fish nor flesh, told Hurvitz in 1977, in the review already mentioned (E.B. X,2 [1977] 170-1), that a passage at Kern-Nanjio 301,5 can only be understood, when one looks in Kern's footnote, where "the correct reading is given by" the Kashgar manuscript. Here de Jong implicitly commends to remove a wrong reading from an edition based on Nepalese manuscripts and enter "the correct reading" found in a representative of another recension. Kern might have agreed, I think, had he known de Jongs argument which is quite convincing.

¹⁴ An example could be K-N 482,3 (n. 8), where Kern, in my view, rightly adopted the Kashgar reading *nirvartīsyati* against *nivartayīsyati* in all Nepalese manuscripts; but he should have removed *sāṃparāyikam* that is not found in the Kashgar manuscript. *nirvart-* and *nivart-* are opposites. In the Nepalese recension, for those who preach the Dharma (i.e. the Lotus) [karma that is retributed] in this life and in the next will be brought to an end. In the Kashgar manuscript (and in the Chinese translations of Kumārajīva (T.262. 62a16) and (but less clear) Dharmarakṣa (T.263.134 a5), for those who preach the Lotus [merit that produces fruit already] in this life will be brought about. Both Chinese translations lack something like 'bring to end', though they belong to different recensions. The change from *nirvart-* to *nivart-* is the loss of a small stroke in a ligature. This must have occurred rather early, because the Tibetan translation reflects *nivartayati* (see Ejima's Index s.v.).

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